

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02

SS-15 ICA-11 CA-01 VO-05 INSE-00 FBIE-00 SY-05

/093 W

-----061359 101656Z /47

R 101023Z MAY 78

FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6160

INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SHUM, PINT, IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQI CHRISTIANS

REF: BAGHDAD 0865 (NOTAL)

1. GOI EVIDENTLY REMAINS VERY INTERESTED IN, BUT ONLY PARTIALLY INFORMED ON, THE STATUS OF THE 34 IRAQI CHRISTIANS CLAIMING ASYLUM FROM ALLEGED RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION. THE SUBJECT WAS THE ONLY SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE DISCUSSED WITH HASSAN AL-ANBARI, THE MFA'S DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS, AT A SOCIAL GATHERING MAY 8.

2. I GAVE ANBARI A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE SITUATION, AS DESCRIBED IN STATE 83315, AND EXPLAINED THE PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE OF IRAQ'S PUBLIC CLAIMS THAT THE CHRISTIANS WERE KNOWLINGLY INVOLVED WITH THE CIA IN A PLOT TO DISCREDIT THE GOI. I POINTED OUT THAT NO U.S. COURT SHOULD BE EXPECTED TO RETURN THE CHRISTIANS TO A COUNTRY WHICH HAS ACCUSED THEM OF CONSCIOUS ACTIONS CONTRARY TO THE INTERESTS OF THE STATE.

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ANBARI RECALLED THAT I HAD ALREADY TOLD THE MFA SOME TIME AGO THAT THIS WOULD BE THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF THE HASTY AND INTEMPERATE ANNOUNCEMENTS.

3. ANBARI ASKED IF IT MIGHT DO ANY GOOD FOR THE GOI TO ISSUE AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT WELCOMING THE CHRISTIANS BACK AND PROMISING THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE MISTREATED IN ANY WAY. HE

SAID SUCH A MEASURE WAS BEING CONSIDERED, SINCE THE SUBJECT IS ONE OF GREAT CONCERN IN THE GOVERNMENT, AND ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE IRAQI IMAGE IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD. THE LEADERSHIP FELT STRONGLY ABOUT THIS, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF THE EFFORTS THAT HAD BEEN MADE TO INSURE THAT THERE IS NO PERSECUTION OF ANY MINORITY IN THE COUNTRY. ANBARI ADDED THAT THE RECENT VISIT OF U.S. CITIZENS OF IRAQI ORIGIN (REFTEL) IS CERTAINLY PROOF THAT THE GOI HAS DONE WELL IN THIS REGARD. (COMMENT: A MEETING BETWEEN THE MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION AND CONSOFF JOHNSTON CONFIRMS ANBARI'S DESCRIPTION OF THE VISITORS' POSITIVE REACTIONS AND WILL BE REPORTED SEPTEL.)

4. I ASKED ANBARI IF IRAQ, WHICH STRONGLY MAINTAINS THAT THERE IS NO MISTREATMENT OF MINORITIES ACROSS THE BOARD, WOULD BE WILLING TO MAKE A STATEMENT OF NON-PERSECUTION WITH RESPECT TO A SPECIFIC GROUP. SUCH A MOVE, WHILE IT MIGHT HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE THINKING OF U.S. COURTS, COULD SET A PRECEDENT AND NECESSITATE SIMILAR STATEMENTS IN THE FUTURE FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS THE GOI WAS ATTEMPTING TO ATTRACT BACK TO IRAQ. IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF THE 34 CHRISTIANS, ADDITIONALLY, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT THINKS THEY HAVE DONE SOMETHING WRONG BUT ARE TO BE FORGIVEN FOR IT. THIS MAY LEAD U.S. COURTS TO BELIEVE THERE IS SOME QUESTION AS TO THE WISDOM OF SENDING THEM BACK. ANBARI DID NOT HAVE AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, AND IT WAS NOT

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CLEAR THESE POINTS HAD BEEN CONSIDERED.

5. COMMENT: IT APPEARS THAT IRAQ MAY INDEED BE PREPARED TO MAKE SOME FORM OF PUBLIC STATEMENT. IF IT WERE TO BE ISSUED AND NOT ACHIEVE THE DESIRED GOAL, IRAQ'S EMBARRASSMENT WOULD BE FAR GREATER THAN IT EVIDENTLY IS AT PRESENT. AT ONE POINT, AS I UNDERSTAND IT, THE DEPARTMENT WAS CONSIDERING SOLICITING JUST SUCH A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE GOI AND ABANDONED THE IDEA FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY ADVICE THE DEPARTMENT COULD PROVIDE AS TO THE POSITION WE SHOULD TAKE IF THE SUBJECT AGAIN COMES UP--AS IT PROBABLY WILL.

PECK

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